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Monday, 8 October, 2001, 14:19 GMT 15:19 UK

## Cleric said Climbie was 'possessed'



Victoria Climbié (centre) suffered months of abuse

A preacher has told an inquiry into the death of eight-year-old Victoria Climbié that he thought she was possessed by evil spirits when he saw her wounds.

Pastor Pascal Orome said he did not suspect Victoria - killed in one of Britain's worst child abuse cases - was being abused despite seeing her torture injuries.

She was taken to his church in Borough, south-east London, by her great aunt Marie Therese Kouao, who was one of her killers.

Mr Pascal told the inquiry he knew Victoria was coping with hardship when he saw the girl, but did not advise Kouao to take her to the doctor because he was "too busy" with other parishioners.

After one service at the Mission Ensemble Pour Christ Church, he went over to Victoria and said a prayer, telling her: "You are delivered from witchcraft or wicked spirits."

Mr Orome, who has been preaching for two years told the hearing that Victoria "was the first time I see such a problem of evil spirits in a child of seven or eight".

### 'Evidence' of evil

He said he did not believe Kouao was abusing

“**Victoria ... was the first time I see such a problem of evil spirits in a child of seven or eight**”

**Pastor Pascal Orome**



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#### Internet links:

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Victoria although he did think it was strange that Victoria was always poorly dressed in comparison to Kouao.

The child's great aunt also told him that Victoria - who she claimed was her daughter and called Anna - was incontinent, put excrement into food, burned herself and made a mess at home.

These were all activities which provided evidence that she was possessed, the pastor said.

Kouao, 44, and her boyfriend, Carl Manning, 28, were both jailed for life for Victoria's murder in January this year.

When she died in February 2000, she had 128 separate injuries on her emaciated body

Mr Orome said his church had no guidelines for dealing with child abuse.

Victoria's behavioural problems disappeared for a time, but two weeks later, Kouao told Mr Orome they had returned.

He told the hearing the evil spirits had returned because Kouao had not looked after Victoria well enough.

### Everyday knocks

Mr Orome the injuries Victoria displayed were consistent with the everyday knocks a child receives when growing up in Africa.

"I never thought about that [Kouao being the abuser] because she said she was the mother and to me a mother who is bearing a baby for nine months in the womb cannot mistreat their child.



Kouao systematically abused Victoria



**I know now you cannot take people at their word. You have to find out for yourself**



**Pat Mensah, preacher**

"I was thinking that she [Victoria] was just coming from Africa so after about six months or a year she would get better."

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On the day that Victoria died Kouao told Mr Orome that she had found a new church in north London where "miracles" were being performed.

She was taking Victoria there for prayers and they had told her that they should fast for eight days.

### **Church attendance advised**

Another preacher, Pat Mensah, told the inquiry that she had been duped by Kouao into thinking that she was a good mother to Victoria.

Mrs Mensah told the inquiry: "I know now you cannot take people at their word. You have to find out for yourself."

Mrs Mensah, who visited Victoria at home in February, saw a marked difference in the child.

Unaware that Kouao was abusing Victoria Mrs Mensah told Kouao to contact social services or the Citizens Advice Bureau to find help.

She also suggested that she should go to church.

Mrs Mensah told the inquiry: "There was no reason for me to doubt her love for the child. It did not even occur to me that there was abuse going on.



Carl Manning beat Victoria with a bike chain

"I saw her as the mother of the child and a mother who cared for the child." Mrs Mensah said that she had no suspicions about Kouao even after Kouao had relayed to her claims from Victoria that the injuries had been caused by witchcraft.

The inquiry continues.

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